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Not many 7-year-old boys have an interest in U.S. Sen. Edward Kennedy, let alone visit Washington, D.C., to urge Congress to support food-allergy legislation for the nation's schools.

But Gurnee's Benjamin Block-Glickman is that boy, and he joined 97 other children last week to press the case to more than 30 lawmakers and their staffs. He was part of an effort organized by the Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network.

What Benjamin and the other children want from Congress is a law that would help them at school.

Proposed is the Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Management Act. In part, it would have the federal government establish voluntary national standards for schools on how to handle children with food allergies.

Benjamin, a first-grader at Woodland Elementary East, is fatally allergic to peanuts, shellfish, tree nuts and fish.

If specific guidelines are in place at schools, Benjamin said, he could avoid a repeat of the time when a Woodland employee directed a girl to sit next to him in a lunchroom without knowing if she had nuts or other food that could set off a fatal allergic reaction.

"I didn't used to be allergic to nuts, but I just figured it out," said Benjamin.

Benjamin's mother, Lisa Block, said she's working to get Gurnee-based Woodland Elementary District 50 to improve its awareness of children with food allergies. She already has helped prod District 50 into training bus drivers and teachers to handle a food-allergy emergency involving a child.

Still, Block said, educators need to know more about how to accommodate children with food allergies, such as not isolating them from their peers.

Block recalled how Benjamin wasn't allowed to participate in some classroom birthday celebrations because unsafe treats were brought in. She said that can be avoided if schools request goodies made with ingredients not harmful to any children in a classroom.

"We're not trying to take peanut butter out of every child's lunch," Block said.

District 50 spokeswoman Jennifer Tempest Bova said the district had policies regarding food allergies, but Block called attention to some inconsistencies. She said Block and other parents are helping administrators craft specific guidelines.

Anne Munoz-Furlong, chief executive officer and founder of the Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network, said Benjamin and the other children were more effective than adults in relating their stories in Washington.

"What we hoped for is children who want to come to Washington and aren't afraid to talk to important people," Munoz-Furlong said.

Schools vary widely in managing students with food allergies, which is why a federal law is needed, she said. They range from employees not having any training to everyone being in the loop about what to do in the event a child has a potentially fatal allergic reaction.

Benjamin, who is reading a book about Kennedy and watched him in action on the Senate floor, joined the other children in direct meetings with 29 representatives and four senators last week. He also met Republican U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk of Highland Park at a Walk for Israel event in Buffalo Grove.

Kirk, a co-sponsor of the food-allergy legislation, said he believes it has a genuine chance to become law. He said many schools don't know how to deal with children with food allergies because awareness hasn't been widespread.

He added that efforts are under way to increase funding for food-allergy research at the National Institutes of Health.